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SENSITIVE

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SUBJECT: FROM THE MOUTHS OF BABES - BOTSWANA PUBLIC OPINION
ON ZIMBABWE

NOT FOR INTERNET POSTING

¶1. (U) United Nations Day was celebrated in Botswana on October 24 in Kang, a small, remote way station on the Trans-Kalahari Highway in the Central Kalahari District. The Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, Phandu Skelemani, many other GOB officials, and representatives from about 14 diplomatic missions and the UN agencies attended the event. Pol/Econ Officer represented the Embassy.

¶2. (SBU) The UN Day celebration centered on this year's theme of Youth Empowerment and featured two youth choirs, a traditional dance group and a youth drama group from a local intermediate school. The drama group wrote a play for the occasion, in which an imaginary "product" had been developed to aid youth empowerment. The play's plot involved the marketing of this "product" to Zimbabwe's Robert Mugabe and Iran's Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. Throughout the play, the promoters of the product were met with lines, especially from the child portraying Mugabe, that sounded as though they were taken directly from speeches - "this is just a Bush plan from the West," "we don't need the West's interference," and "the West can go to hell if they think we will accept their plans for us."

¶3. (SBU) The audience, which included hundreds of local school children and adult community members, seemed to love this portrayal of Mugabe and laughed after each line was delivered. However, the Zimbabwean Ambassador to Botswana, seated in front of Poloff, was visibly upset by the play and its portrayal of his government. The Ambassador summoned a UN official to his seat and repeatedly protested that the play was insulting and had no connection to the theme of UN Day. At the end of the play the audience gave it rousing applause, while the Ambassador from Zimbabwe made a hasty exit from the gathering, skipping the remaining UN Day events.

¶4. (SBU) COMMENT: Though the UN Day celebration was a light-hearted event, the crowd's reaction to the play demonstrates that Robert Mugabe does not enjoy grassroots support in Botswana, including in the most far-off corners of the country. The audience in Kang was largely made up of rural Batswana from the central and western part of the country who are the least impacted by the current influx of Zimbabwean refugees, and yet even their reaction seems to show that the average citizen agrees with the

GOB's tough stance against the Mugabe government.
END COMMENT
NOLAN